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**Title:**

Cybernetics and ‘Temporal Architecture’:  
Nicolas Schöffer and the Making of the Centre Pompidou

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**Abstract:**

Hungarian born, Paris based artist Nicolas Schöffer (1912-1992) is known for his pioneering engagement with computer technology and his role in the development of cybernetic art. He is also well known for the radical cross-disciplinary way he approached his practice, working in the areas of architecture, city design, industrial design, film and video, music, dance and graphic poetry. For various reasons Schöffer’s work has not enjoyed a critical reception in the field of architecture, especially in English Language discourse, despite a significant body of architectural and urban projects and his close association with architects and architectural commentators during his lifetime. Schöffer believed that art should integrate the technologies of the time in which it is made. He categorised his work according to a series of sensory typologies: time, light, sound, climate and space, which embraced the dynamic potential of new computer technologies. In this respect his work can be understood in relation to the twentieth century movement in the visual arts towards a synthesis of the arts; one that was played out in a particular way in France and that has a particular importance in the history of architecture. Looking at Schöffer’s work offers an opportunity to investigate a series of more conceptual questions relating to the historical role of technology in the arts, its relationship to the concept of disciplines, and to the historicity of experience. In particular it offers an opportunity to understand the Modernist project for a synthesis of the arts around architecture, within a longer historical trajectory that includes aspects of sensory experience otherwise neglected. This paper will address these conceptual questions by considering Schöffer’s work in relation to various discourses on aesthetics contemporaneous with Schöffer’s practice that attempted to formulate an understanding of the impact of new technology in the visual arts, including the work of French art theorist and historian Frank Popper. This paper will look particularly at Schöffer’s architectural works including: the *Maison à Cloisons Invisibles* (1957), a project undertaken with the support of the Philips company for a house without walls where spatial differentiation was created through temperature differences; his entry for the *Plateau Beaubourg* architectural competition for the building of an arts centre in Paris which would later be known as the *Centre Pompidou* (1970- 71); and *La Ville Cybernetique* (1969), his project for a cybernetic city.